

# Connected Communities

## Linking Communities to Historic Environments:

### A research review summary

Alex Hale (RCAHMS)



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### **Executive Summary**

The Linking Communities to Historic Environments (LCHE) research review assessed the broad range of projects and approaches that state-related organisations and civil society heritage bodies apply to engaging people with the historic environment. The review began with an expert advisory panel meeting, followed by a collaborative workshop between panel members, historic environment sector professionals who undertake engagement programmes, and participants who take part in engagement projects (see Appendix 1 for a list of contributors and notes). Two additional internal workshops were held at the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS), to gather experiences and information from staff. The fourth and final element has been the writing of a discussion paper, based on a review of the literature and the assessment of engagement examples, including six case studies. The full discussion paper draws out and explores various issues from past experience of engagement. These issues include constant and on-going funding problems, institutional processes that affect projects, inward-facing attitudes by some professionals in the heritage sector, and technological advances that can help people engage with aspects of the historic environment. It is intended that the discussion paper will be submitted to the *International Journal of Heritage Studies* for publication (Hale forthcoming). This research review is a short summary of the full discussion paper.

### **Researchers and Project Partners**

Alex Hale (Principal Investigator), Robin Turner (Co-Investigator) – both RCAHMS

## **Expert Advisory Panel**

Susan Bain – Western Isles Manager, National Trust for Scotland

Tertia Barnett – **Project Manager, Scotland’s Rural Past**

Lucy Casot – Casework Manager, Heritage Lottery Fund, Scotland

Mathew Godfrey – Project Manager, Lincolnshire Heritage at Risk

Andy Heald – Director, AOC Archaeology Ltd

Paul Jardine – Director, Jura Consulting

Sian Jones – Professor of Archaeology, School of Arts, Histories and Cultures, University of Manchester

Daniel McKendry – Principal Regeneration Officer, East Renfrewshire Council

Bridget Paterson – Project co-ordinator, Discover Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme (DBLPS)

John Pelan - Director, Scottish Civic Trust

Robin Turner – Head of Survey and Recording, RCAHMS

## **Key words**

Historic environment, community, engagement, research, challenges, good practice, future directions

## Introduction and definitions

The concepts of 'historic environment' and 'community' change over time, through fashion, political emphasis, heritage sector advances and academic discourse. However, for the purposes of this short summary the historic environment can be considered to be any part of the built fabric of a place that has a historic connection for people to that place. This broad definition enables people to feel connected to places, through buildings, archaeological remains, ideas, objects, stories, feelings, experiences and thoughts. Similarly the definition of community is considered to be broad, but one which can be refined if necessary to take into account communities of interest, from heritage sector staff to individuals who participate in engagement projects and processes, and organisations who consider themselves part of a community of engagement. It is **important to the author not to define 'community' too closely, as that could lead to an** implication of exclusion: in this study the inclusiveness of the term is considered an important strength, based on the assumption that any person or group of people wishing to engage with any aspect of what they consider to be a part of the historic environment, should be considered to be part of the 'community'.

## Heritage Sector Research

This section looks at previous and current research conclusions in the arena of historic environment community engagement. Taking the broad range of the sector as a whole, we can identify national, regional and local scale groups, bodies and organisations that fund, facilitate, undertake and research engagement activities. These include the Heritage Lottery Fund, Museums Galleries Scotland, Department of Culture, Media and Sport. This also encompasses work undertaken or commissioned by heritage organisations, such as RCAHMS, Historic Scotland, the National Trusts, English Heritage, CADW and the Council for British Archaeology. The following outlines the range and breadth of research undertaken in the heritage sector.

Extensive data gathering, analysis and research is undertaken by and for funders of historic environment projects. This ranges from the in-depth work by the Heritage Lottery Fund (see Maeer 2008, Maeer & Fawcett 2010), which covers the whole range of the heritage sector, to specific pieces of commissioned research into particular areas of engagement (e.g. Thomas 2010 for the Council for British Archaeology). These vital research reviews enable organisations to develop strategies for engagement and are freely and widely available to inform people who are thinking about engagement. However, their distribution, usage and availability – often only across the internet and accessible through project officers, funding organisations and heritage agencies – often makes them difficult to access, compile and collate, and to interpret their accumulated results.

Recently a number of researchers have cast a critical eye over the approaches taken to community engagement projects from the archaeological end of the historic environment spectrum. Many of their findings can be applied across the historic environment sector as a whole. These published research findings discuss the aims of community engagement and outline the many vital components of engagement, the processes therein and the

power paradigms that exist in the current heritage sector in Britain and beyond. Simpson and Williams (2008) proposed a self-reflexive, critical approach to community archaeology engagement, which demands a greater reflection on community involvement in project design, management and evaluation. This could be termed the **'bottom-up' approach**. Smith and Waterton (2009) proposed that **'true' community** (archaeology) projects are created, undertaken and completed by community members, rather than being created, managed and delivered by an external organisation – a **'top down' approach**. Isherwood's thesis **teases apart the intricacies that are inherent in** community engagement projects (2010). He identifies that the practice of bringing people together to generate knowledge through participation – in this case in an archaeological context – is a vital and very strong motivational process. He also recognises the fact that participation is an important aspect of the process, perhaps even more than the results that are generated, although this may be dependent on the individual and organisational aims and objectives for participating in the project in the first place. It was commonly found that people were especially keen to engage in historic environment projects for three reasons: understanding the past and their surroundings, contributing to a sense of place, and learning and interacting in a social environment with experts.

## **Six Case Studies**

In 2002 Stephanie Moser and colleagues published a seminal work on the complexities associated with community archaeology (Moser et al 2002). They developed a model, based on a fieldwork project, with seven components:

- 1 communication and collaboration
- 2 employment and training
- 3 public presentation
- 4 interviews and oral history
- 5 educational resources
- 6 photographic and video archive
- 7 community-controlled merchandising.

The model is routinely applied, adapted and tested across the community engagement project spectrum and it was considered appropriate to use it to test the six case studies chosen for this research review. This model can be tested, updated and become part of a re-iterative process for community engagement projects, taken from across the historic environment spectrum. Below the model is used to test the six chosen case studies and it has also been updated to take into account the changes that have occurred over the past nine years.

Six case studies were chosen to represent national, regional and local-scale projects from across the historic environment arena. The case studies demonstrate engagement practices that were complementary to one another, rather than being necessarily comparable. They are complementary because the types of projects, the specific aspects of the historic environment that they focus on, the funding and the management mechanisms are so different from one project to another. From the built historic

environment sector the projects chosen were: Doors Open Day (DOD), Lincolnshire Heritage at Risk (LH@R) and Neilston Renaissance. The archaeological projects were: **Scotland's Rural Past (SRP), National Trust for Scotland St Kilda Work Parties (St Kilda)** and the Discover Bute Landscape Partnership Scheme (DBLPS). The case studies were reviewed to identify good practice, issues and challenges, and are helpful in informing potential future directions at both project and strategy level. Details of each project are outlined in full in the discussion paper (Hale forthcoming).

### Project characteristics

There are three main characteristics of the chosen community engagement projects. The characteristics of each of the case studies allows them to be classed as either adopting a **'top down', 'bottom up' or 'middle way' approach. 'Top down' implies a project that has been developed, planned, funding sought and is being implemented and managed by an external partner, who then instigates the engagement project with a group or groups of participants. The 'bottom up' approach is a project that is instigated, managed and executed by a community group, but which may draw on external expertise for some aspects of the engagement. A 'middle way' project is an amalgamation of the above two approaches and develops a collaborative model between funders, participants, engagement organisations and other community members.**

It is of course possible for projects to change and develop over time and thus straddle **more than one approach. For example, the Scotland's Rural Past project began as a 'top down' developed project, but as the project progressed the community participants began to show that they wanted to take more of a role in terms of steering their own individual projects. This pattern of a shift towards community control can be found across the board when it comes to historic environment community engagement projects. This is indicative of the positive effect that engagement projects have on people, changing them from being passive observers to being actively engaged participants, wanting to take more control and ownership over 'their' projects. This changes projects from their origins as being 'top down' to becoming 'middle way'. The underlying implication, from observing projects over their lifespan, is that they change from being one form to another as a response to changes that can occur during projects, brought about by the needs of any of the project partners. Negotiating these changes are sometimes complex and require skill and diplomacy.**

The characteristics of each case study – as planned but not necessarily as enacted – are shown in the following table:

	<b>SRP</b>	<b>DOD</b>	<b>St Kilda</b>	<b>LH@R</b>	<b>DBLPS</b>	<b>NR</b>
Top down	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
Bottom up	N	N	N	N	N	N
Middle way	N	Y	N	N	Y	Y

## Good practice

There are three main areas where historic environment community engagement projects demonstrate good practice: in skills development for all participants; by improving local, regional and national historic environment databases; and the overall community benefit to the historic environment sector. Not surprisingly, evidence of good practice can be identified from each of the case studies.

1. Previously engagement projects have not been seen as being designed specifically and exclusively for skills development. However, in the current political climate, skills development – empowering through training – is seen as an important aspect of participation. The table below shows which projects built 'skills development' into their project design. One area where skills development can readily be practiced is through the uses of new and unfamiliar technology.
2. A vital question from the sector's point of view is whether the project feeds into an overall increase in understanding of the historic environment by the sector partners? This was assessed by seeing whether the engagement results were fed into historic environment datasets, which could subsequently be used by the public, communities of interest, researchers and managers.
3. The third assessment of good practice was whether the projects improved community knowledge of the historic environment, so that participants were enabled to recognise that their project contribution had consequences beyond their positive, participation experiences.

The three areas of good practice from the case studies are:

	<b>SRP</b>	<b>DOD</b>	<b>St Kilda</b>	<b>LH@R</b>	<b>DBLPS</b>	<b>NR</b>
Skills development for participants	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Improving local, regional and/or national historic environment datasets	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N
Community benefit to the historic environment sector	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

## Issues and challenges

Four particular issues and challenges were identified:

1. Funding problems, which are inherent in short-term projects;
2. **Legacy, after projects finish, including participant's expectations being (mis-)managed and not accounted for post-project;**

3. Building capacity within the heritage sector to provide skilled individuals able to undertake community engagement projects. This point relates to the ability of the professional sector to provide staff trained in a specialist area and who also have the ability to demonstrate and teach those skills to participants. This was identified as being crucial to the success of sustained, positive community engagement processes.

The issues and challenges identified from the case studies are:

	<b>SRP</b>	<b>DOD</b>	<b>St Kilda</b>	<b>LH@R</b>	<b>DBLPS</b>	<b>NR</b>
Funding issues	N	Y	N	N	N	N
Time limited project with legacy issues	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	N
Building capacity and sustainable skills	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N

### Testing the case studies against Moser's model

The following table re-uses Moser's seven components, and has adapted them for the current climate of engagement. It demonstrates the variety of aims, methods and results that can be achieved from historic environment community engagement. It should, however, be noted that the absence of an attribute in a project is as a result of this component not being part of the project's original aims, rather than it being a failing of the project.

	<b>SRP</b>	<b>DOD</b>	<b>St Kilda</b>	<b>LH@R</b>	<b>DBLPS</b>	<b>NR</b>
Communication and collaboration	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Training and employment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Education, dissemination and outreach	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Interviews and oral history, metrics	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Young people and teaching resources	Y	N	N	Y	Y	Y
Archives	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N
Merchandising, rights, ownership	N	N	N	N	N	N



## Recommendations for Future Directions

Four areas for further work have been identified from the above analysis, which may help point to further research.

### **.1 Listening exercises to gauge what people want from community engagement and heritage sector organisations**

Engagement processes and projects are heavily reliant on effective communication. Through the course of this review it became clear that project instigators often sourced funding before they communicated with the potential communities with whom the project would engage. One future strategy would be to initiate communication exercises earlier, 'up-stream' before project funding has been sought, in order to understand and work collaboratively with a community group to develop a project that they really want to be a part of.

### **.2 Ensuring organisations are able to unlock information from local sources in a mutually beneficial manner**

Engagement projects must be considered to be the *start* of continuing processes, and to be mutually beneficial to the engagement partner and the engaged community members. This approach builds a partnership working model, based on a network of individuals, all of whom have a role to play in the project. The heritage sector organisation undertaking the engagement must have and be prepared to maintain the resources and skills to deliver high quality engagement. If this is not the case, the **project can risk damaging not only the organisation's reputation**, but also the reputation of the historic environment sector as a whole. Modern technology, the use of social media and the world wide web is one area where the historic environment sector can increase its community engagement and deliver quality engagement.

### **.3 Designing organisational processes that benefit the historic environment and the people engaged**

Community engagement has in the past been seen as an 'add-on' to projects. However, it is now generally considered a central part of the role of heritage sector organisations. This often arises because the individual organisations now need to access varied and new funding sources. The centrality of community engagement may be seen by organisations as a change in emphasis or even a change in role. Organisations need to assess their strengths and weaknesses in the community engagement arena, and ensure that the activity is embedded in their organisational aims and objectives, if it is to be an **integral part of the organisation's role**. For example, RCAHMS was established to survey and record the historic environment of Scotland; however over time the emphasis has shifted to incorporate a broader community engagement role.

### **.4 Strengthening historic environment sector skills**

Finally, as the heritage sector, in common with others, goes through a soul-searching period brought about by the current financial reductions, it is opportune that the sector

reassesses and recognises how they can contribute to community engagement, rather than seeing community engagement as a solution to funding short-falls. Strategic aims and core roles of heritage organisations across Scotland, the UK and Europe currently have to be re-considered and clearly defined. Hence it is incumbent upon the sector to build and maintain a skilled workforce to protect, record, research and promote the historic environment, with and for all manner of community partners and parts of **society, and with the overall aim of improving everyone's wellbeing and quality of life.**

## Conclusions

Three themes have evolved from this research review into how the historic environment sector engages people with their past. The first is that past models of engagement have been proven to work and work well and can be suitably updated to take advantage of modern technology **and changes in people's needs and wishes, but that future research** could usefully focus on what communities want to get out of historic environment engagement projects. The implication that 'one size fits all' does not apply to community engagement projects in the historic environment sector and hence plurality and diversity is a strength of the sector. The underlying requirement for projects is that they have to remain responsive and considerate to changes brought about by any member of the project partnership. Secondly, heritage organisations, from national institutions to charitable bodies and commercial companies, need to define their roles within the changing landscape of the heritage sector, to enable users to recognise which is the most appropriately skilled and resourced organisation to work with, when it comes to community engagement. Finally, the heritage sector needs to work with partners out-with the sector, to broaden the range of potential collaborators and ensure that community engagement not only embraces a small group of enthusiastic members, but embeds the understanding and appreciation of the historic environment within the wider community. For example, improving and strengthening the links between heritage sector community engagement projects and the health and well-being agendas, which include a large proportion of community involvement.

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## Appendix 1

### LCHE collaborative workshop attendees:

Bridget Paterson	DBLPS
Hannah Smith	RCAHMS
Jill deFresnes	RCAHMS
Tom Dawson	SCAPE Trust
Alan Thompson	DBLPS volunteer
Lesley Ferguson	RCAHMS
Patricia Beaton	North Lanarkshire Council
Rebecca Bailey	RCAHMS
Graham Umpleby	Lincolnshire Heritage at Risk volunteer
Jill Evans	St Kilda Work Party member
Abigail Daly	Scottish Civic Trust

Amy Gillespie	RCAHMS
Jonathan Wordsworth	Archaeology Scotland
George Geddes	RCAHMS
Adrian Cox	Historic Scotland
Danny McKendry	East Renfrewshire Council
Kyle Armstrong	RCAHMS
Susan Casey	RCAHMS
Barry Prater	Scotland's Rural Past volunteer
Rosemary Mann	Cockburn Association
Susan Bain	National Trust for Scotland
Mathew Godfrey	Lincolnshire Heritage at Risk
Paul Duffy	DBLPS
Alex Hale	RCAHMS
Mike Middleton	RCAHMS
Robin Turner	RCAHMS
Laura Carswell	Neilston Development Trust
Tertia Barnett	Scotland's Rural Past
Gavin McGregor	Northlight Heritage
Gill Chitty	Council for British Archaeology
Mark Watson	Historic Scotland
Leanne McCafferty	RCAHMS

## Workshop Notes

### Linking Communities to Historic Environments Workshop

**26<sup>th</sup> May 2011**

The workshop aimed to discuss good practices, challenging experiences and potential future directions for engagement projects by combining facilitators, from across the heritage spectrum, with experts and participants from community engagement projects. This workshop aimed to be an example of cross-partnership, broad-sector working. It was hoped that by linking facilitators, from different heritage institutions, with public participants, a broad range of experiences would be discussed and the results form part of the LCHE recommendations for good-practice, challenges and future directions. Here are the notes from the 4 discussion groups, which have been collated into the salient points that are pertinent to each question.

#### **MORNING SESSION FOCUSED ON:**

#### **What's the point of community-based historic environment projects?**

##### **What do volunteers/communities want to get out of it?**

Social aspects, including fun

Economic reasons i.e. up-skilling, improving skills for future job prospects

Interest- general and specific

Linkage to place-both from locals and incomers

Ownership issues-defining ownerships, constructing ownership

Confidence and improved general well-being, or want to get things out of self-interest

Drive change from within

Responsibility, contribution and duty, people don't necessarily know what to engage with, but want to.

Improve health

### **What do funders/facilitators want and why?**

To tick boxes, through hard to reach audiences eg young people

To get cheap labour

To share skills

To up-skill and build capacity

Harness local knowledge

Facilitate change through community-driven change

To incorporate community into their institutional structure

To access new and different funding streams

Enable focus on historic environment as a win-win for society

### **What changes should there be in the future?**

Broaden the range of funding streams for community engagement work e.g. wind farm community grants

Seek private investment

Address the issues of funding continuity

Heritage institutions should become facilitators

Potential need for institutional structural change

Undertake much greater legacy/sustainability planning

Landscape partnership schemes-what will the next phase bring?

Increased reliance on volunteers

Improve volunteer status

Work with many more young people

Projects driven by results for people, especially up-skilling and making people ready for the labour market

Market drivers taken more into account

Community funding accessed by the community-where is the role for the facilitator?

## **AFTERNOON SESSION FOCUSED ON: What does success look like?**

### **What works in these projects?**

Sustainability beyond project end, through up-skilling of people

When people involved feel they 'want' rather than 'should' contribute

Added value results that were not in project brief

Ensure a robust, appropriate metric framework to measure success

How to measure the 'feeling' of success?

Beware of invalid statistics being used and abused

Aim to change a project into a process

### **What doesn't work? Where are there tensions between experts and communities?**

'Parachuting' into areas and then leaving is poor engagement

Institutional commitments vs community needs must be addressed at the outset

Not being clear in your organisation's aims and objectives

Being an enforcer, rather than an informer, work 'with' rather than 'instruct'

Power relationships between paid 'experts' and unpaid 'volunteers'

Hidden agendas

Who defines the agenda?

Internal institutional tensions can destabilise projects

Project scope being over ambitious

Ensuring that all participants know where the project is going and how they fit into it

Contingency and legacy provision should be carefully considered



**What should we do differently in the future?**

Embed expertise in communities

Improve engagement abilities of professionals

Engage with young people through current structures eg Curriculum for Excellence

Funding: broaden scope from wind farm funds to private investors

Use Landscape Partnership models to improve collaborations

Improve project relevance

Clarity on reasons for starting a project in the first place

Assess whether institutional structural change can improve projects



## The Connected Communities

Connected Communities is a cross-Council Programme being led by the AHRC in partnership with the EPSRC, ESRC, MRC and NERC and a range of external partners. The current vision for the Programme is:

*"to mobilise the potential for increasingly inter-connected, culturally diverse, communities to enhance participation, prosperity, sustainability, health & well-being by better connecting research, stakeholders and communities."*

Further details about the Programme can be found on the AHRC's Connected Communities web pages at:

[www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx](http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/FundingOpportunities/Pages/connectedcommunities.aspx)

